

Union With Christ

The Vine and the Branches

This may seem obvious, but Jesus Christ is fundamental and central to Christianity. At its heart Christianity is not about following a set of principles. It is not about theories. It is about reality. It is not simply about adopting a new value system. It is about having life or not having life. The apostle John wrote "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."¹

Being a Christian means more than following the teachings of Jesus. Being a Christian means we can experience the life of Christ every day. We can experience the power and beauty of the exalted Christ every day by the power of God's Spirit. To put it simple as Christians Christ is our life.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.
(Colossians 3:1-4)

According to the New Testament, when Jesus Christ died on the cross legally we died with him.² He was our substitute. And so it was as if we were on the cross. We were with him in his death. Scripture also declares that we were buried with him.³ Then when Christ was raised up from the dead we were raised up with him. The purpose for this is so we may experience a newness of life.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ²Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?
(Romans 6:1-3)

¹ 1 John 5:12

² Romans 6:3

³ Romans 6:4

To be baptized into Christ Jesus does not mean to be immersed in water. It means that we have been spiritually immersed into the person of Christ; into all that he is.

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.
(Romans 6:4)

Being born again, being united to Christ there is a new quality and character to our lives. The life of Christ is in us. Christ is our life. When he appears, Colossians 3 says, we shall appear with him in glory. His glory will be our glory. But the exalted life of Christ will not only be ours in the age to come, Christ is our life now!

Many Christians do not know this and too often we do not act as if it is true. It may seem strange, but we have to be taught and reminded over and over again that we are walking, talking miracles. Galatians 2 informs us that the old you is gone as far as our relationship to God is concerned. There is now a new you since you are united to Christ. Here is how the apostle Paul put it.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.
(Galatians 2:20)

Being united to Christ by faith your old sinful ego was crucified and died. And now you have the awesome privilege of Christ's life in you. He is your new ego. Christ's life and power is within you. And his attitude and mind-set and affections can be seen in your life. This is why we are told back in Colossians 3 to set our mind, to focus our thinking on things above, on spiritual realities, on who are in Christ, what we can do in Christ and what we will be in Christ.

Obviously, we can't sit around all day just thinking of Christ. We need to do our daily tasks, go to school, go to work, care for our families and so on. But we now do all these things with a new perspective. We are not people who will simply work, then retire and then one day die. We are people who can experience the very love, joy, peace and strength of Christ himself – now. And one day we will be glorified with everlasting life.

If that truth doesn't help you to re-examine your life and to live differently, I don't know what will. Yes, I know that we will have our ups and downs. There

will be trials and struggles. But the immeasurable wonder of being a Christian is that you will go through all of this with the life of Christ in you. And this changes everything. Here is Jesus,

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away;⁴ and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.
⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
(John 15:1-4)

The first thing we learn is that the union between Christ and us is intimate. His life is in us. The sap life of the vine is the sap life of the branches. This is the whole secret of our spiritual strength and holiness and beauty. In and of ourselves we have no spiritual life⁵ and we cannot produce any good and godly fruit. But now there is a new life force within us, the very life of Christ.

Secondly, every true believer in union with Christ will produce fruit. There may be only one small cluster of grapes, but that cluster shows us that the life of the vine is in you.⁶ And to help you to produce more fruit, to become more and more like Christ in your thinking and feeling and behavior, God will prune you. In some way he will cut away worldly influences and behaviors that hinder your fruitfulness.

As Philippians 2:13 tells us, God will work in us, but we must decide to obey. We must abide in Christ, in the vine. Spiritually you are united to Christ. But how do you abide in him in a practical way? Well, let me tell you a short story to explain.

Suppose there was someone who had good intentions to live an honorable life, but was very weak of character. This person would begin well, but then fall and give in to every temptation that came along the way. This person's life became one big mess. But then a new friend comes along, someone of strong moral character and full of love.

⁴ This phrase "takes away" is a bad translation of the Greek. It should read "He lifts up." Following the metaphor of Christ being the vine and we the branches, if we are in Christ, but not producing fruit, God will tenderly lift us up to strengthen us. He will not throw us away. It is only the branches that fall away from Christ who are thrown away.

⁵ Ephesians 2:1, 2

⁶ In the parable of the seed and the sower, the seed that fell on good ground produced fruit "some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (Matthew 13:9).

And the new friend says to the weak person, "I am here to help you. Stay close to me at all times and I will help you to be strong." So the weak person stays in contact with his new friend daily, even several times a day. And as a result life begins to shape up for good.

There is only one way for this weak person's life to change and that is by daily, constant contact and conversation with the new friend. Therefore we abide in Christ in a practical way when we hear his word, rely on his strength and obey his voice daily. And when we do this the miraculous happens in our lives.

As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.
(John 15:9, 10)

We abide in the love of God and of Christ when we are obedient. And the commandment we are to obey is in verse 12.

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
(John 15:12)

All of the Father's commandments are summed up in this: love one another as Christ loved you—deeply, sacrificially, seeking the well-being of others. Doing this we bear fruit.

These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.
(John 15:11)

Abiding daily we bear the fruit of joy. And don't let this pass. We have Christ's joy! It is Christ's joy in us that makes our joy full. When we are obedient to love one another the sap joy of the vine flows into the branches and Christ's joy blossoms in our lives. The same is true for our experiencing peace.

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.
(John 14:27)

There is not a boxed gift set of peace on a shelf somewhere in heaven that is given to us. Our experience of peace is the very same peace that the

Lord experiences, because he lives in us! “My peace I give to you” says the Lord! The same life sap of peace that is in the vine is in the branches. The same is true for our spiritual strength and power.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.
(Ephesians 6:10)

To be strong in the Lord means you have the power of **his** might in you. It is the same as the branches being in the vine. Just as the life sap of the vine flows through the branches, so the power of Christ’s mighty strength flows through us.

When we are standing strong against evil and worldly influences, Christ’s power enables us. When we stand strong against temptation, it is Christ’s power that enables us. When we do what is good and righteous, when we share the gospel of peace with others, it is Christ’s power and strength flowing through us.

All of these spiritual and miraculous experiences are the result of Christ’s life in us through the Spirit. We don’t just have joy, we have Christ’s joy. We don’t just have peace, we have Christ’s peace. We don’t just have strength, we have Christ’s strength! Let’s return to Colossians.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ *who is our life* appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.
(Colossians 3:1-4)

Christ is our life—not only the guarantee of our everlasting life in the age to come, he is our life now. We can experience his love, his joy, his peace and strength. So if you are serious about living life with Christ flowing through you, **act like it!** Don’t shuffle along in life merely pursuing the things other people chase.

Focus your mind, your thoughts and affections on the things Christ cares about. Think about. Think about life as he thinks about life. Work at your job as he would work. Love what he loves. And even if the world never notices, when Christ returns as King of kings, you will appear with him in all his glory.

